

# An Overview of Abortion in the United States




**Guttmacher Institute**  
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# Objectives

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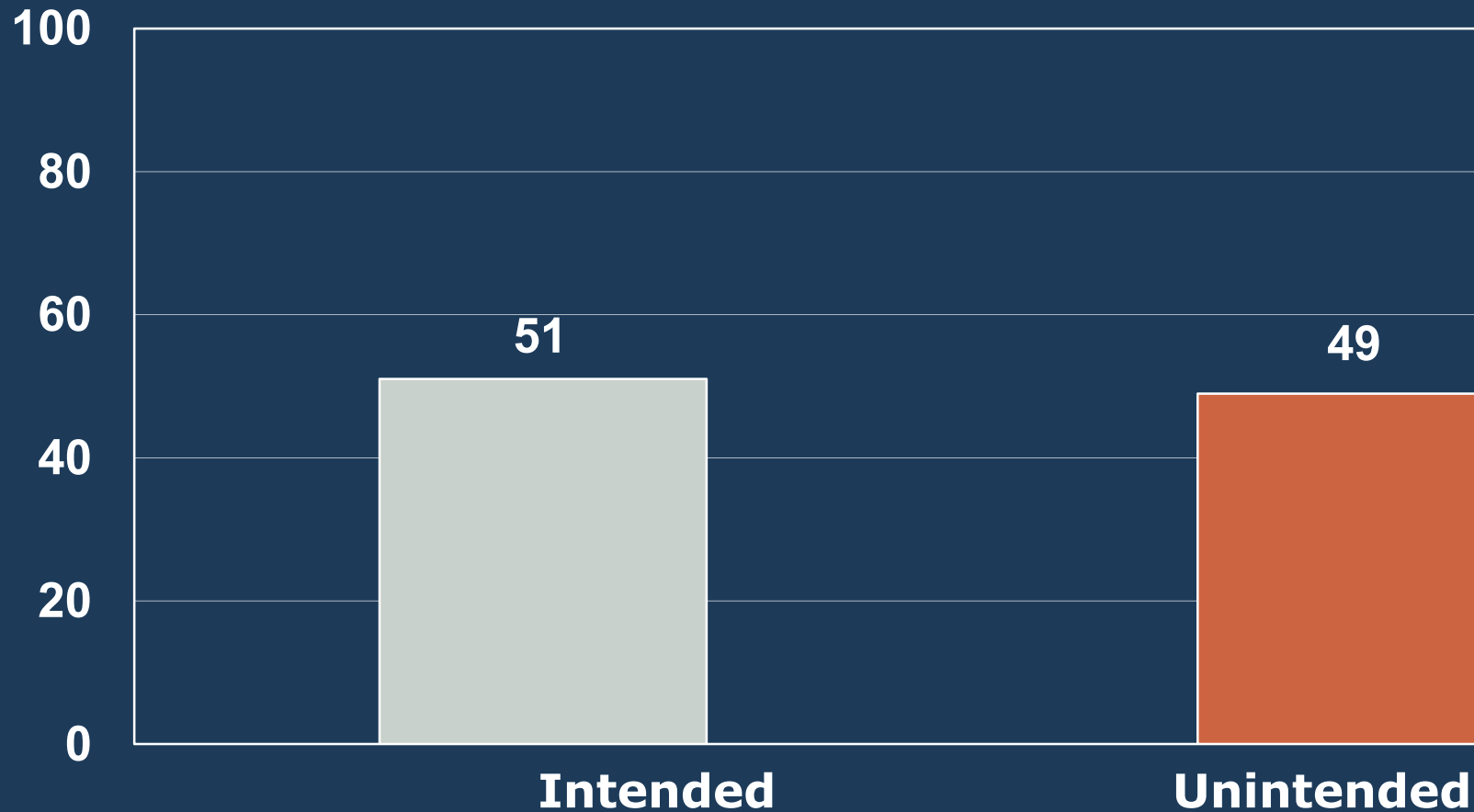
- Provide an overview of unintended pregnancy and abortion in the United States.
- Review the incidence of pregnancy and abortion.
- Identify who has abortions, why and when in pregnancy.
- Review the safety of abortion.
- Discuss provision of and access to abortion services.
- Provide a comparative international perspective on abortion.



# **Incidence of Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion**

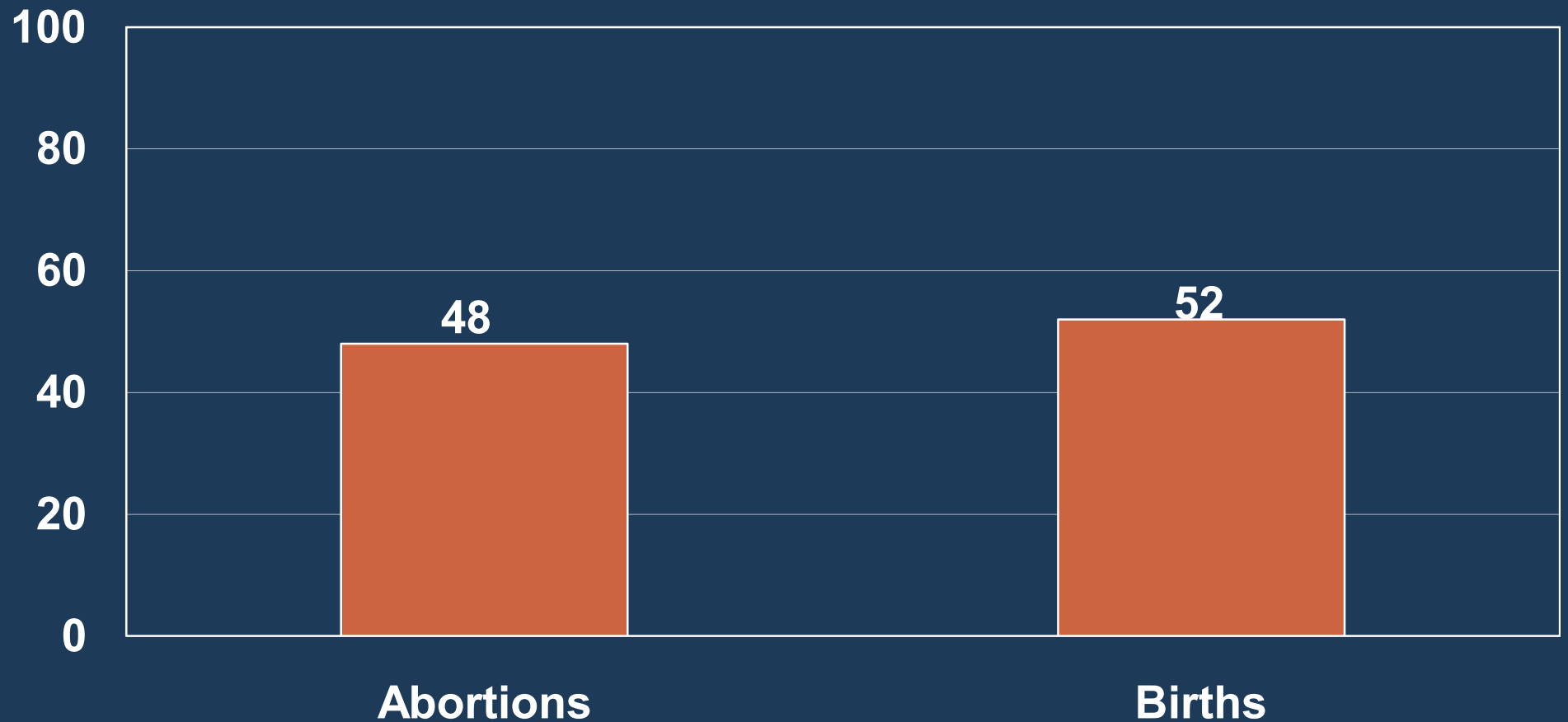
# Pregnancies in the United States (Approximately 6.4 Million in 2002)

% of pregnancies



# Outcomes of Unintended Pregnancies (Approximately 3.1 Million in 2002)

% of unintended pregnancies (excluding miscarriages)



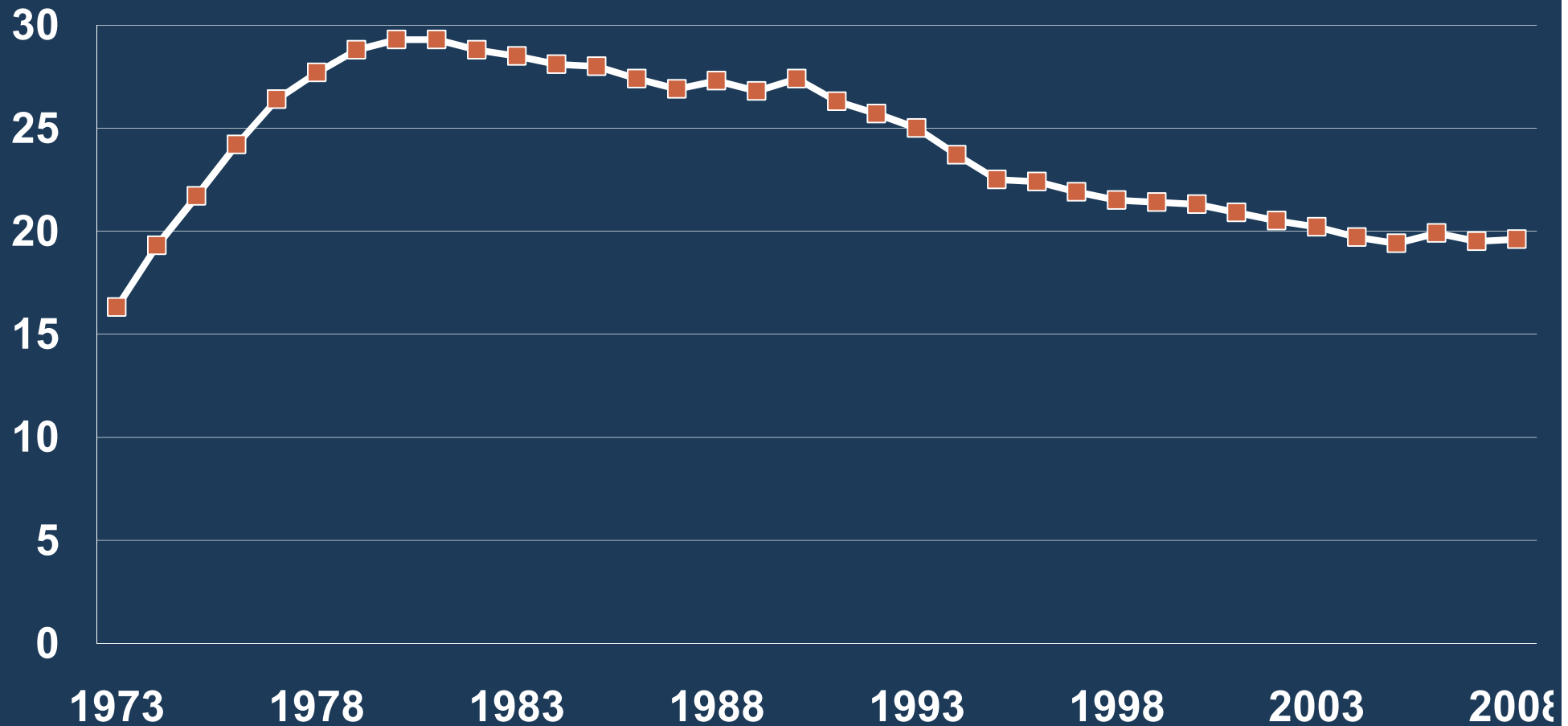
# Incidence of Abortion

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- In 2008, some 1.21 million pregnancies were terminated by abortion in the United States.
- Almost 2% of all women aged 15–44 had an abortion in 2008.
- Abortion is one of the most common surgical procedures in the United States.

# Abortion Rates Among Women Aged 15–44

Abortions per 1,000 women

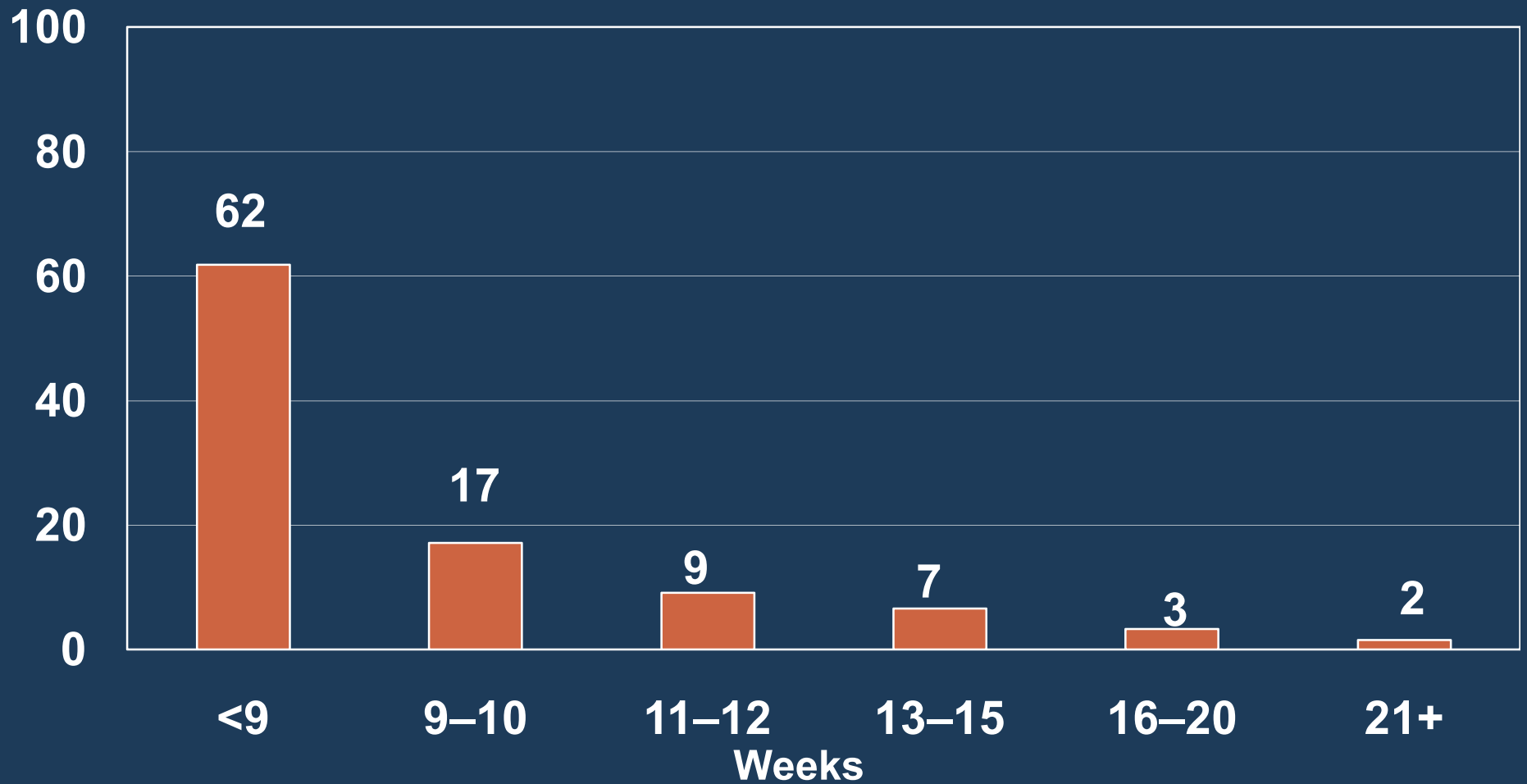




# Gestational Age

# Abortions Overwhelmingly Occur Early in Pregnancy

% of abortions



# Incidence of Early Medication Abortion, 2008

- Early medication abortion accounted for 17% (199,000) of all nonhospital abortions, an increase from 6% in 2001.
- An estimated one-quarter of eligible abortions (those performed up to nine weeks) were early medication abortions.
- Fifty-nine percent of all known providers offer this service, compared with 33% in early 2001.\*

\* Mifepristone was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration for use in early medication abortion in September 2000.



# Reasons for Abortions

# Most Important Reasons Given for Terminating an Unwanted Pregnancy

<b>Concern for/responsibility to other individuals</b>	<b>74%</b>
<b>Cannot afford a baby now</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>A baby would interfere with school/ employment/ability to care for dependents</b>	<b>69%</b>
<b>Would be a single parent/ having relationship problems</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Has completed childbearing</b>	<b>38%</b>

# Reasons for Abortions After 16 Weeks Since Last Menstrual Period

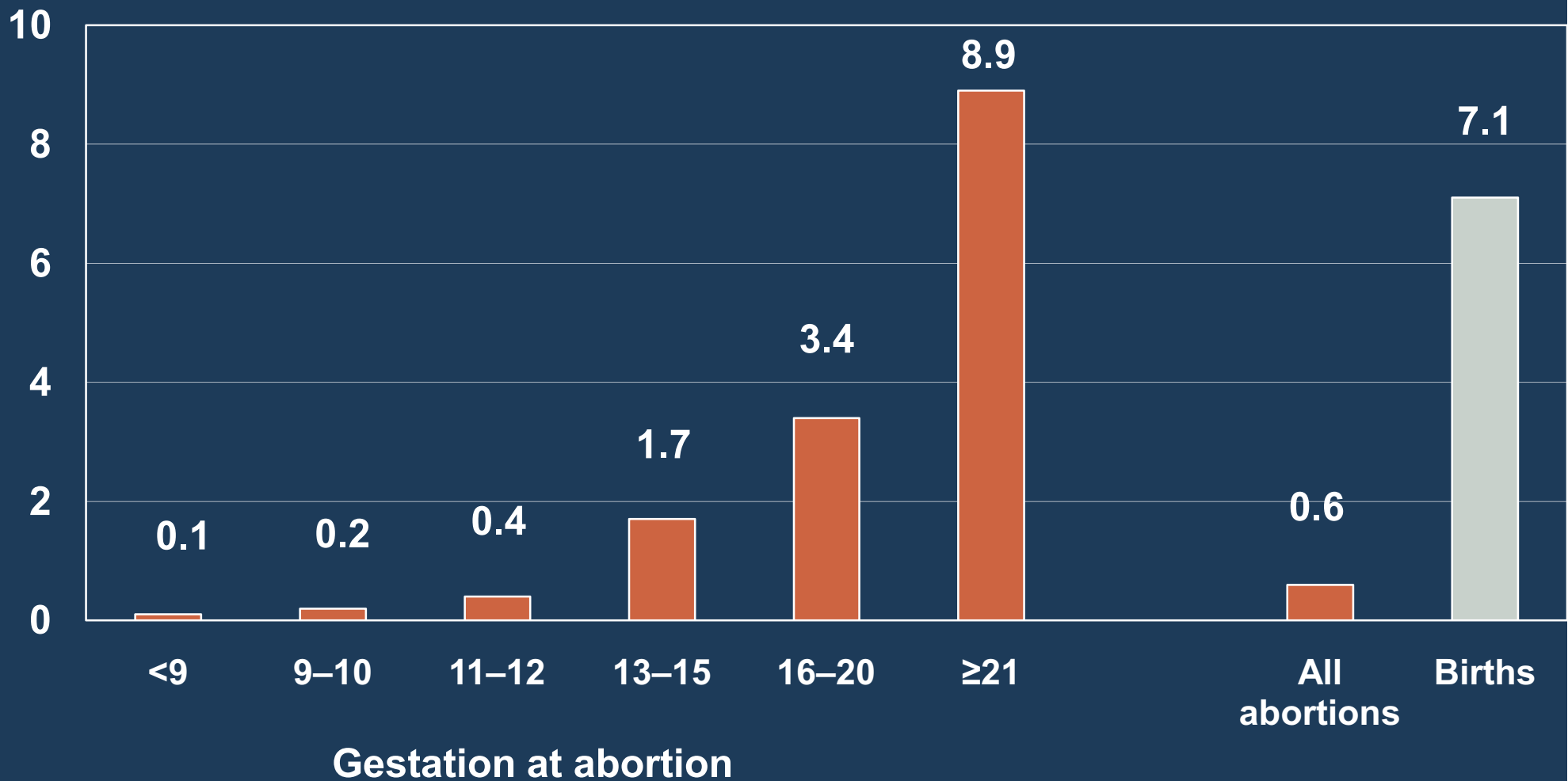
<b>Did not recognize the pregnancy</b>	<b>71%</b>
<b>Had difficulty making arrangements for abortion</b>	<b>48%</b>
<b>Was afraid to tell parents or partner</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Needed time to make decision</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Hoped relationship would change</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Was pressured not to have abortion</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Something changed during pregnancy</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Did not know timing was important</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Did not know abortion was an option</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Fetal abnormality was diagnosed late</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>11%</b>



# Safety of Abortion

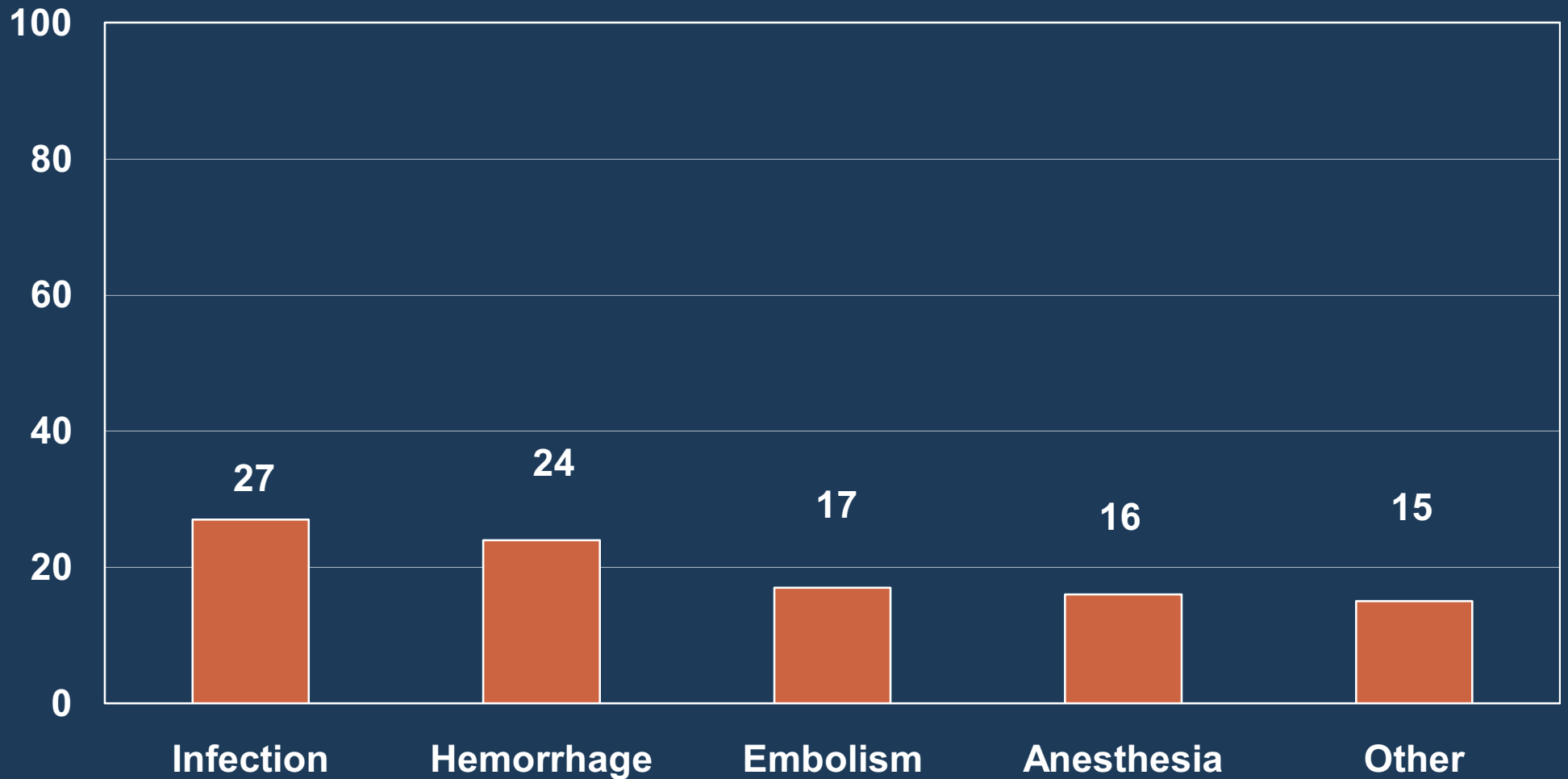
# Abortion Is Safer the Earlier in Pregnancy It Is Performed

Deaths per 100,000 abortions



# Causes of Abortion-Related Deaths

% of deaths



# Long-Term Safety of Abortion

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- First trimester abortions pose virtually no risk of
  - Infertility
  - Ectopic pregnancy
  - Miscarriage
  - Birth defect
  - Preterm delivery or low birth weight
- Abortion is not associated with breast cancer.
- Abortion does not pose a hazard to women's mental health.



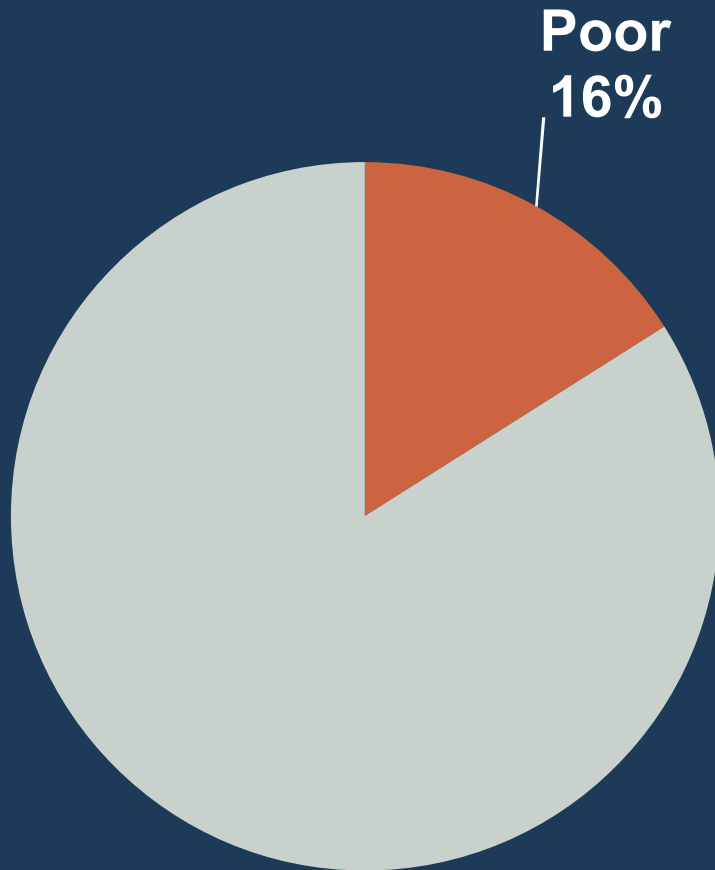
# Who Has Abortions

# Disparities in Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion Are Increasing

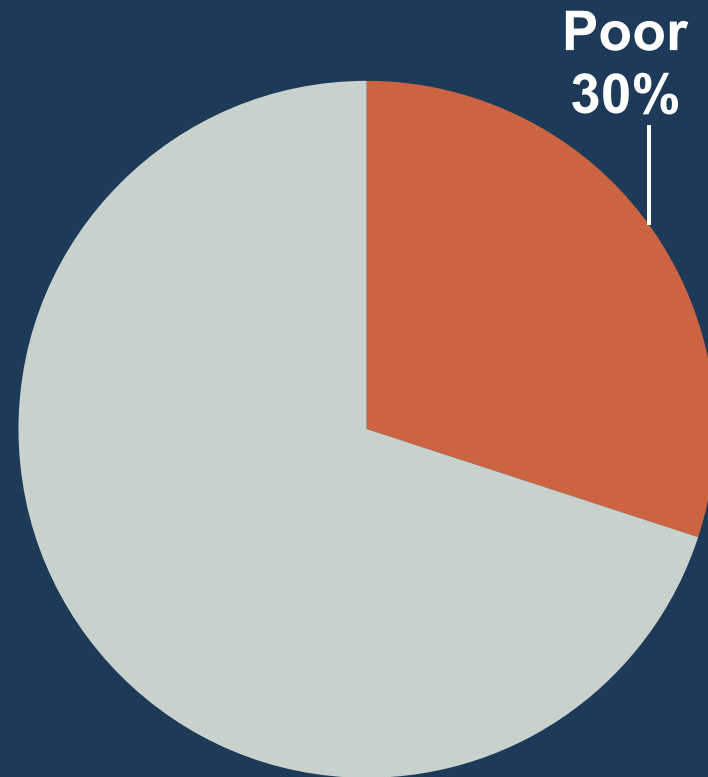
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- Overall unintended pregnancy rates have stagnated
- Yes, unintended pregnancy has *increased* by 29% among poor women while *decreasing* 20% among higher income women.

# Poor Women Account for a Disproportionate Share of Unintended Pregnancies

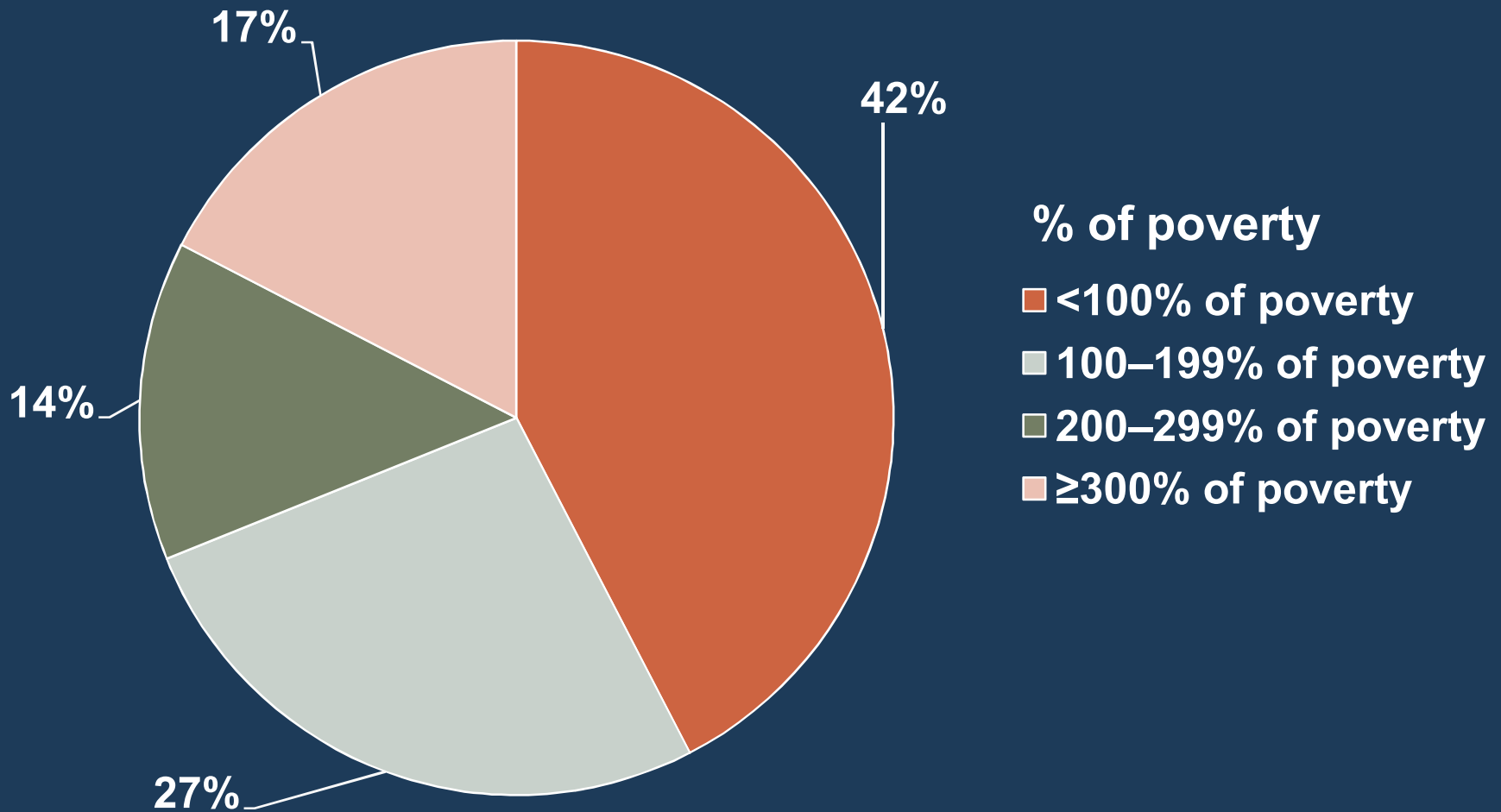


Women at risk of unintended pregnancy

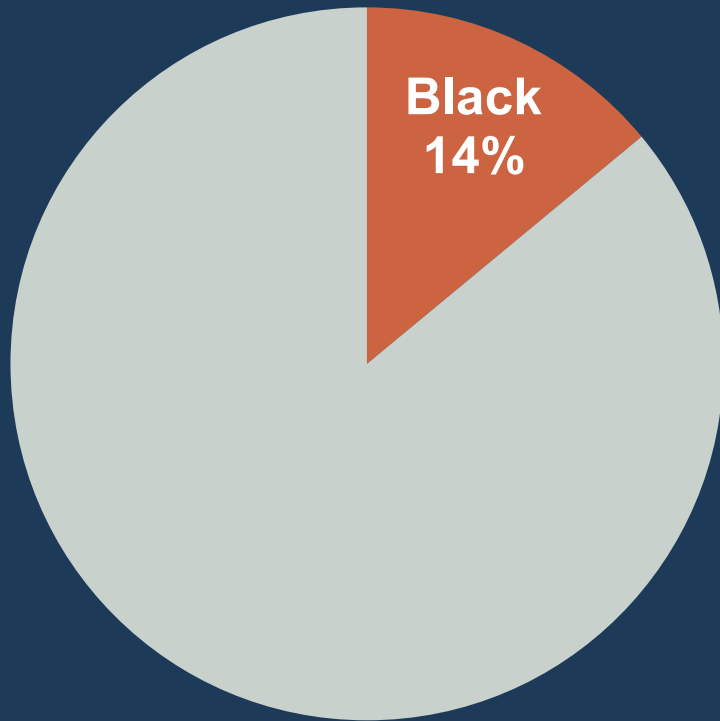


Unintended pregnancies by women's poverty status

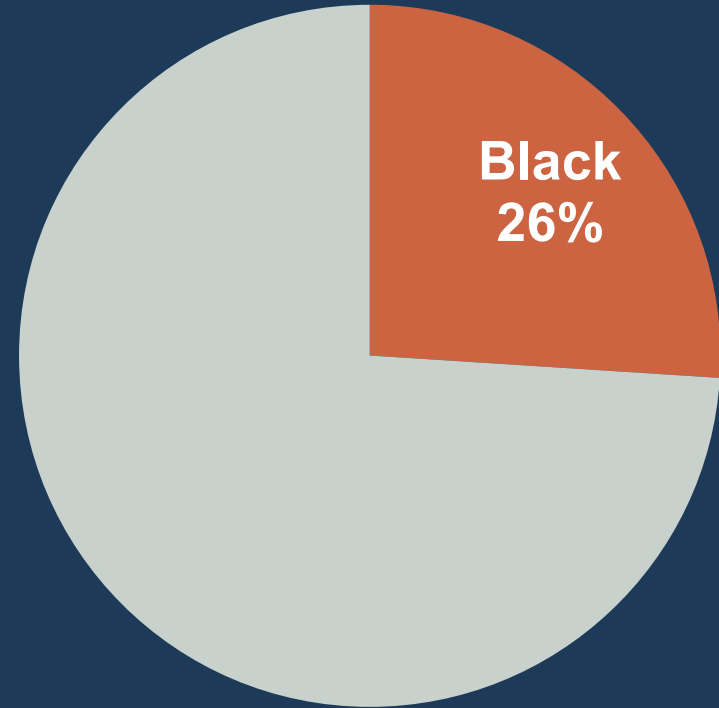
# Poor Women Are Also Overrepresented Among Abortion Patients



# Black Women Account for a Disproportionate Share of Unintended Pregnancies

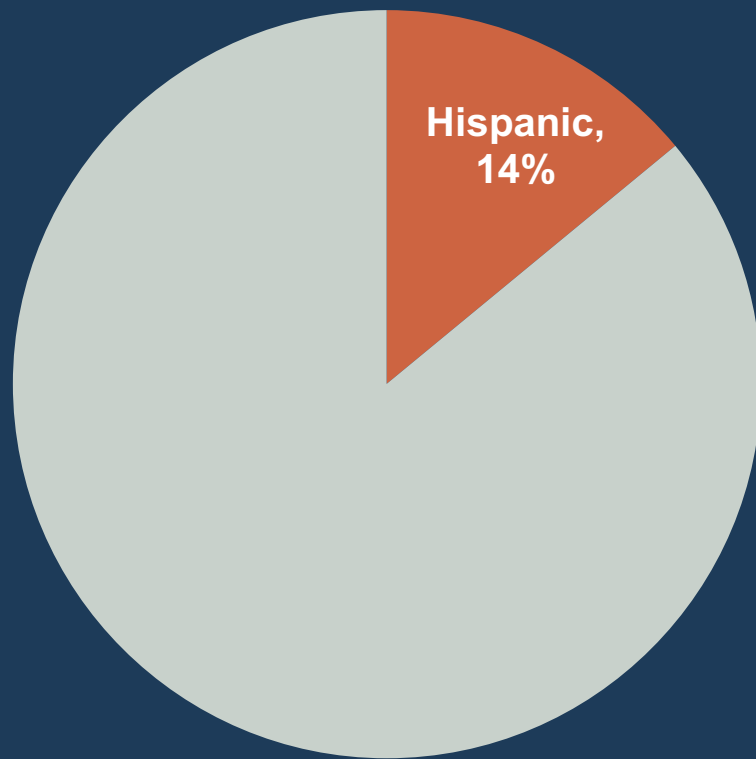


Women at risk of unintended pregnancy

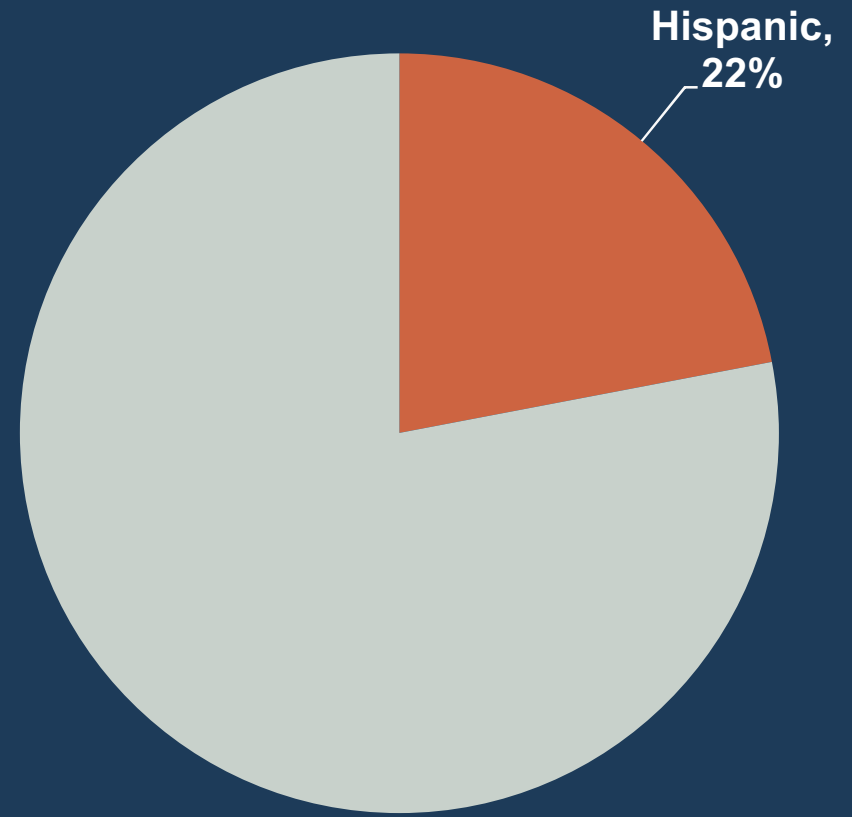


Unintended pregnancies by women's racial status

# Hispanic Women Also Account for a Disproportionate Share of Unintended Pregnancies

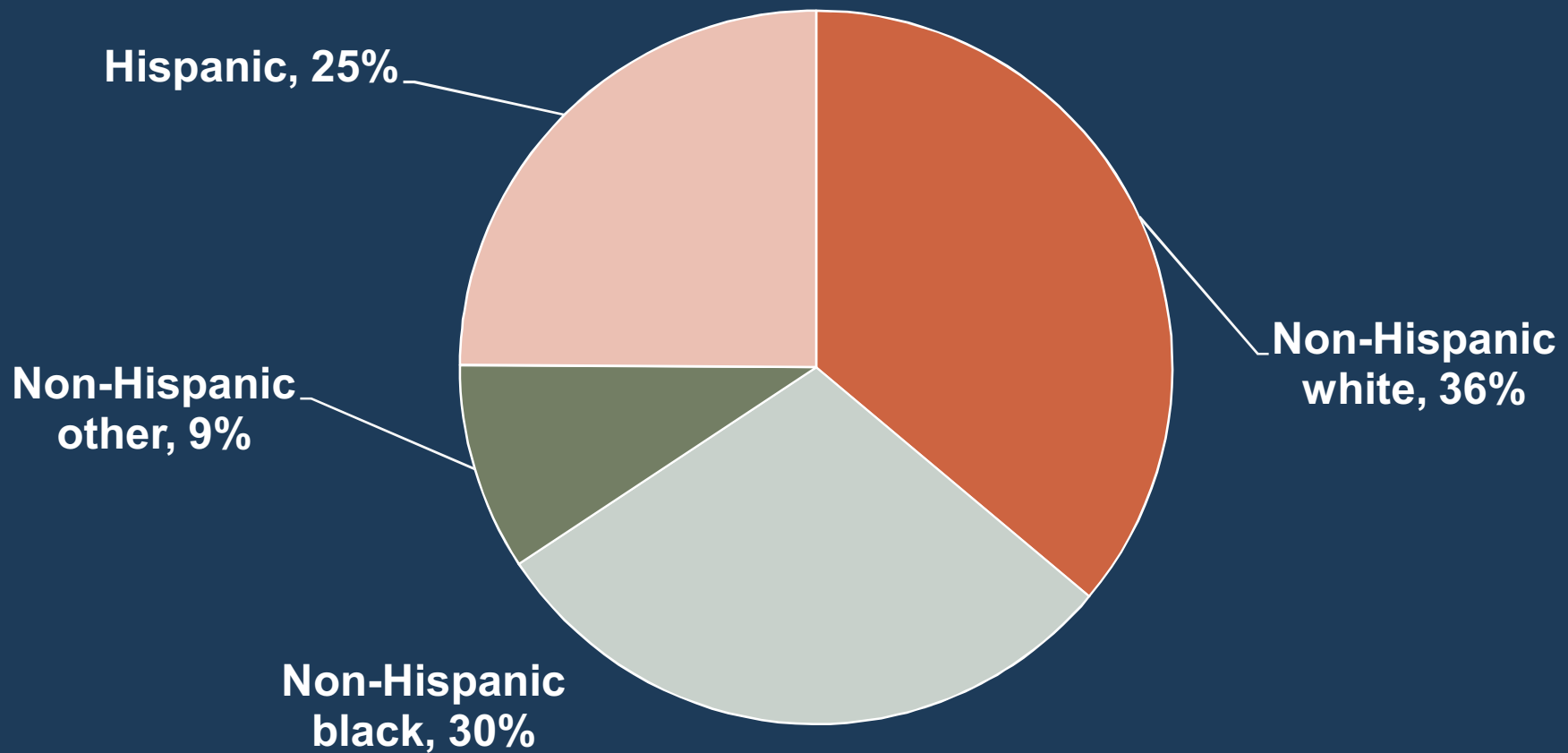


Women at risk of unintended pregnancy

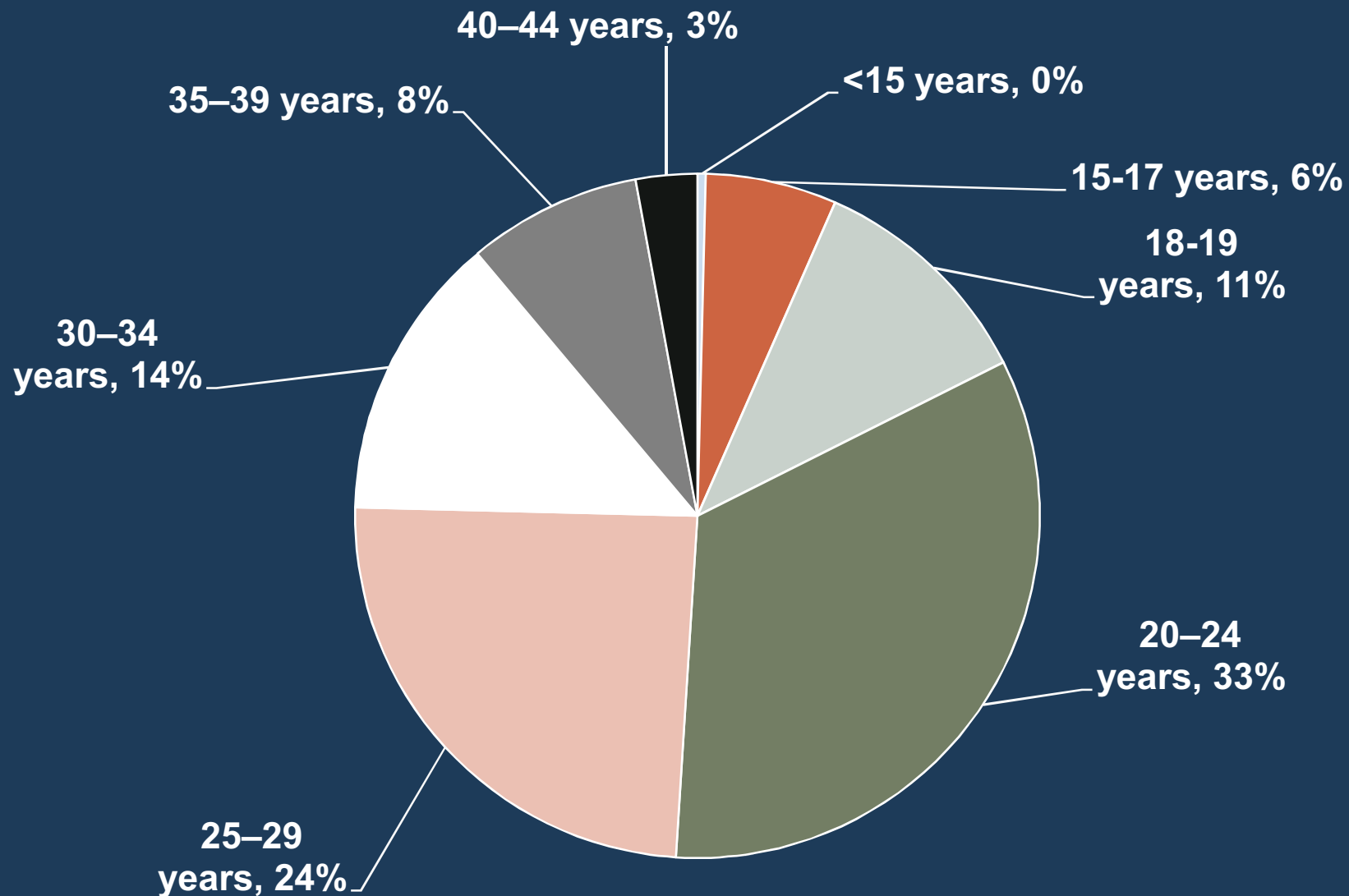


Unintended pregnancies by women's ethnic status

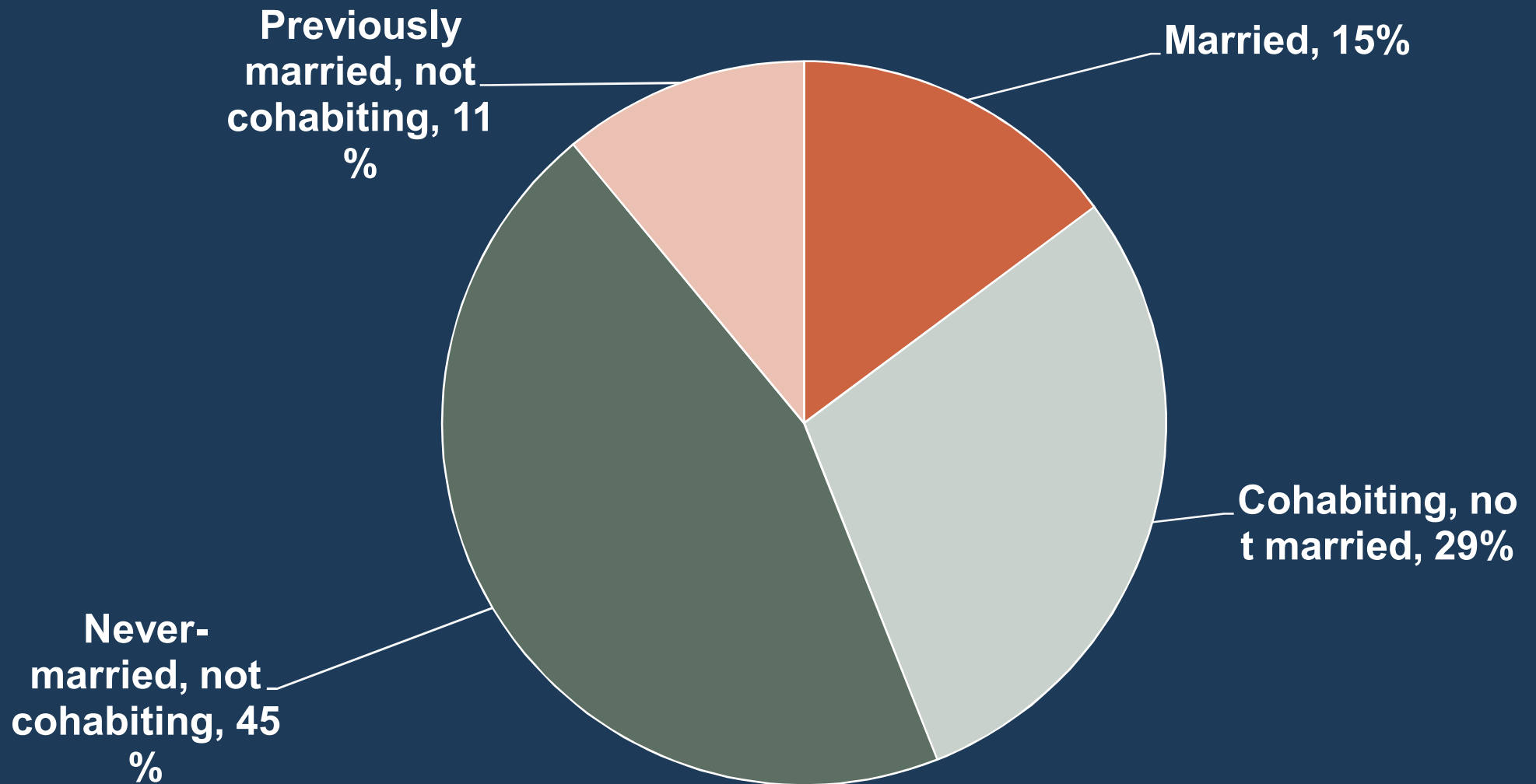
# And Both Groups Are Overrepresented Among Abortion Patients



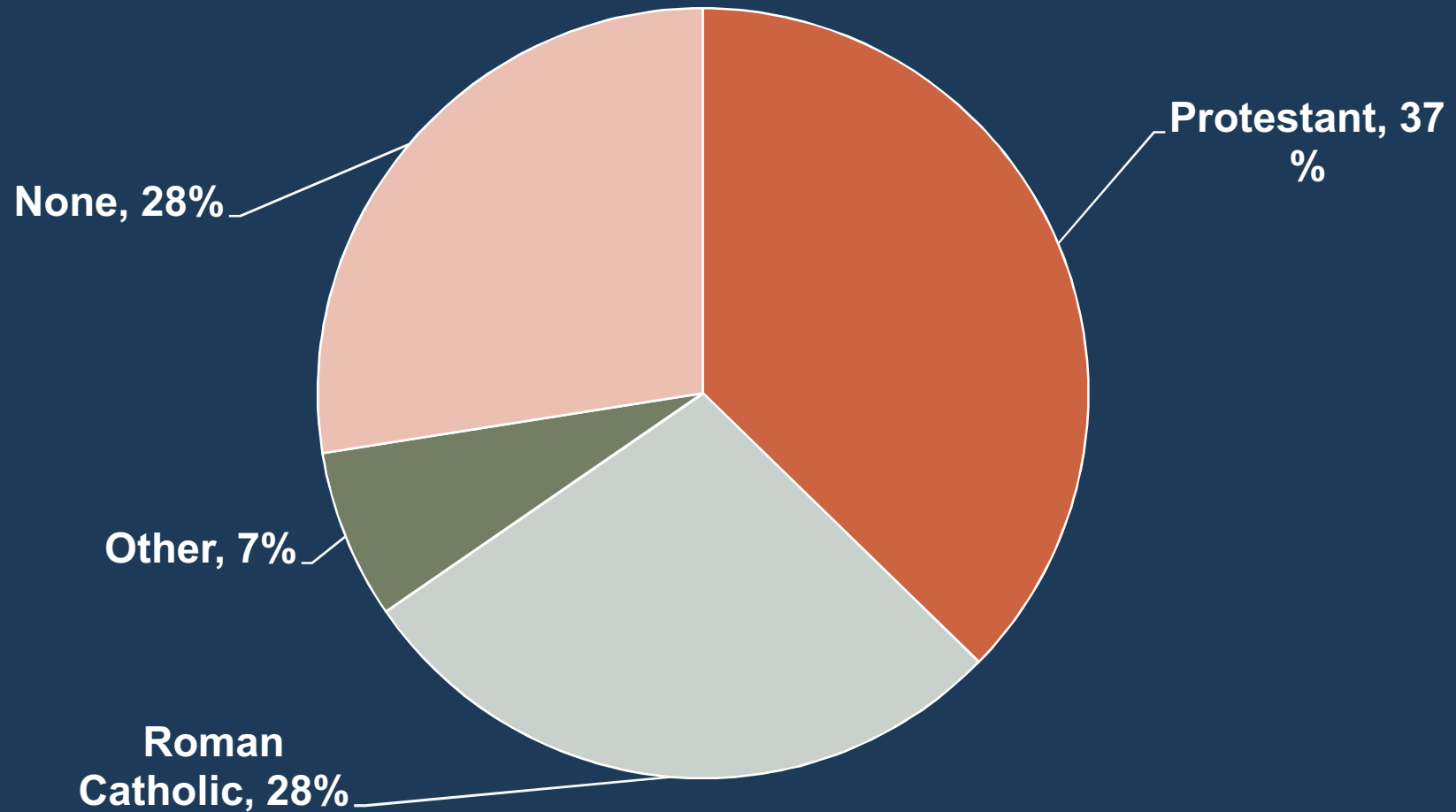
# Women in Their 20s Make Up the Majority of Abortion Patients



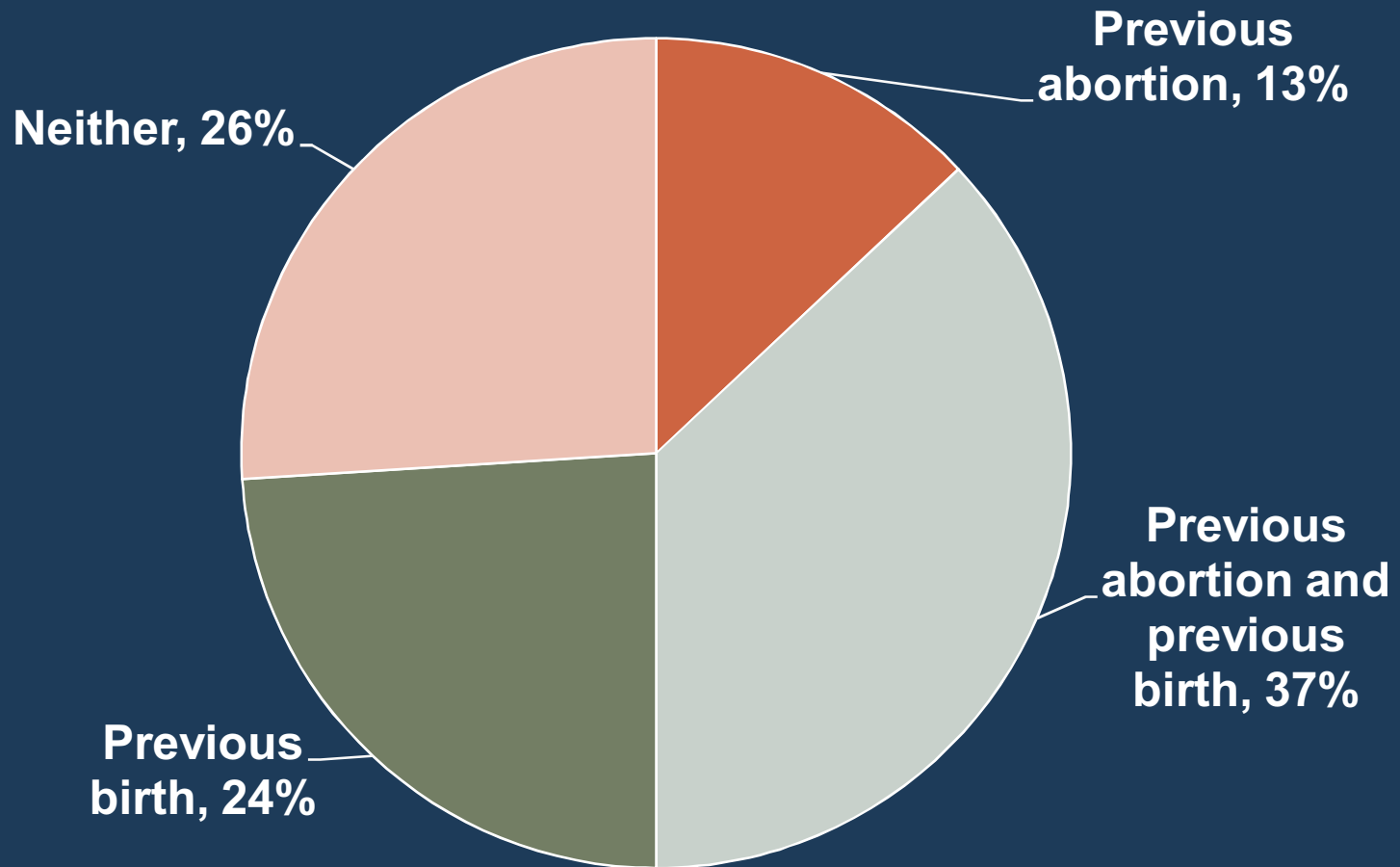
# Nearly Half of Abortions Are Obtained by Never-Married Women



# Most Women Obtaining Abortions Report a Religious Affiliation



# Six in 10 Women Having Abortions Are Already Mothers

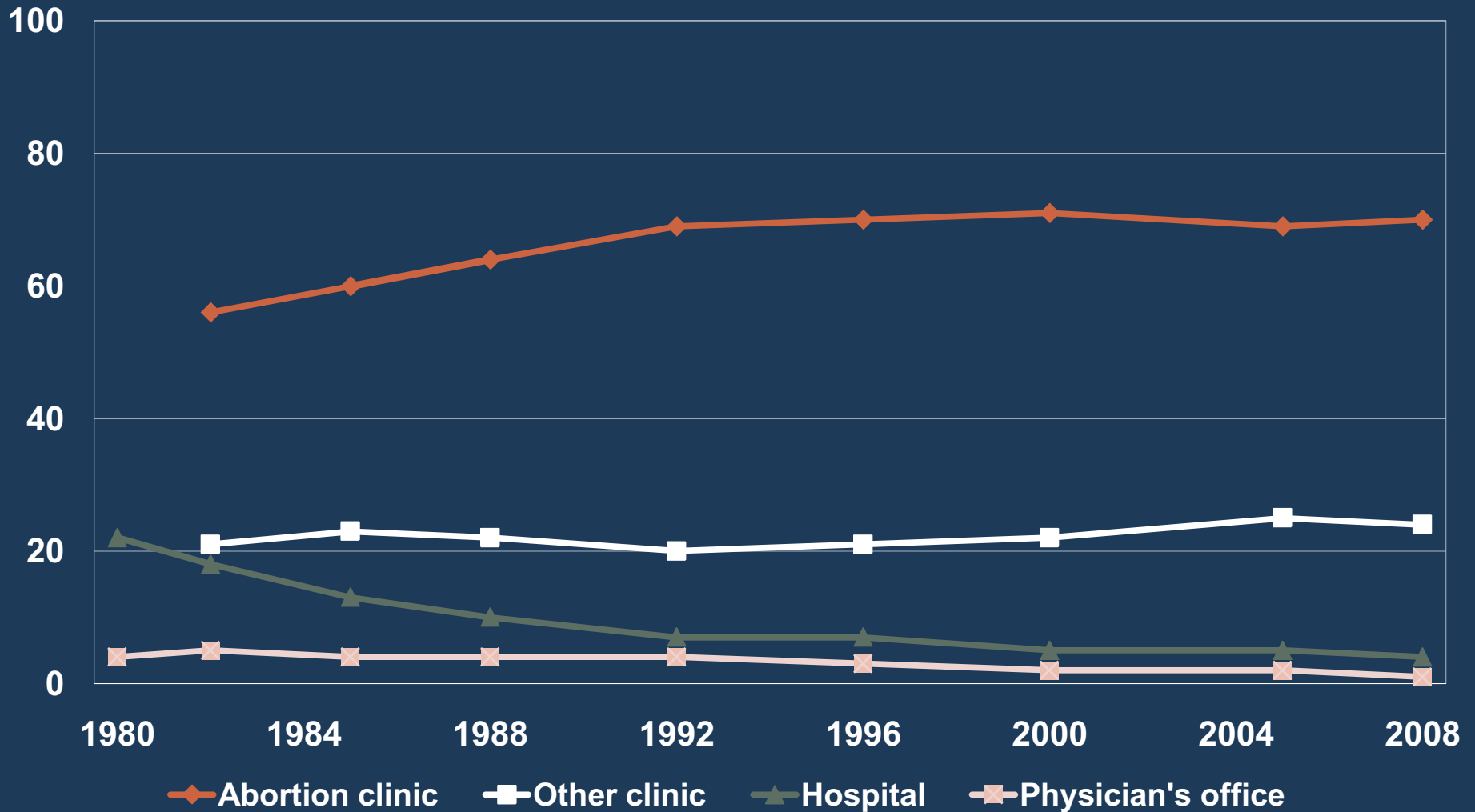




# Who Provides Abortion Services

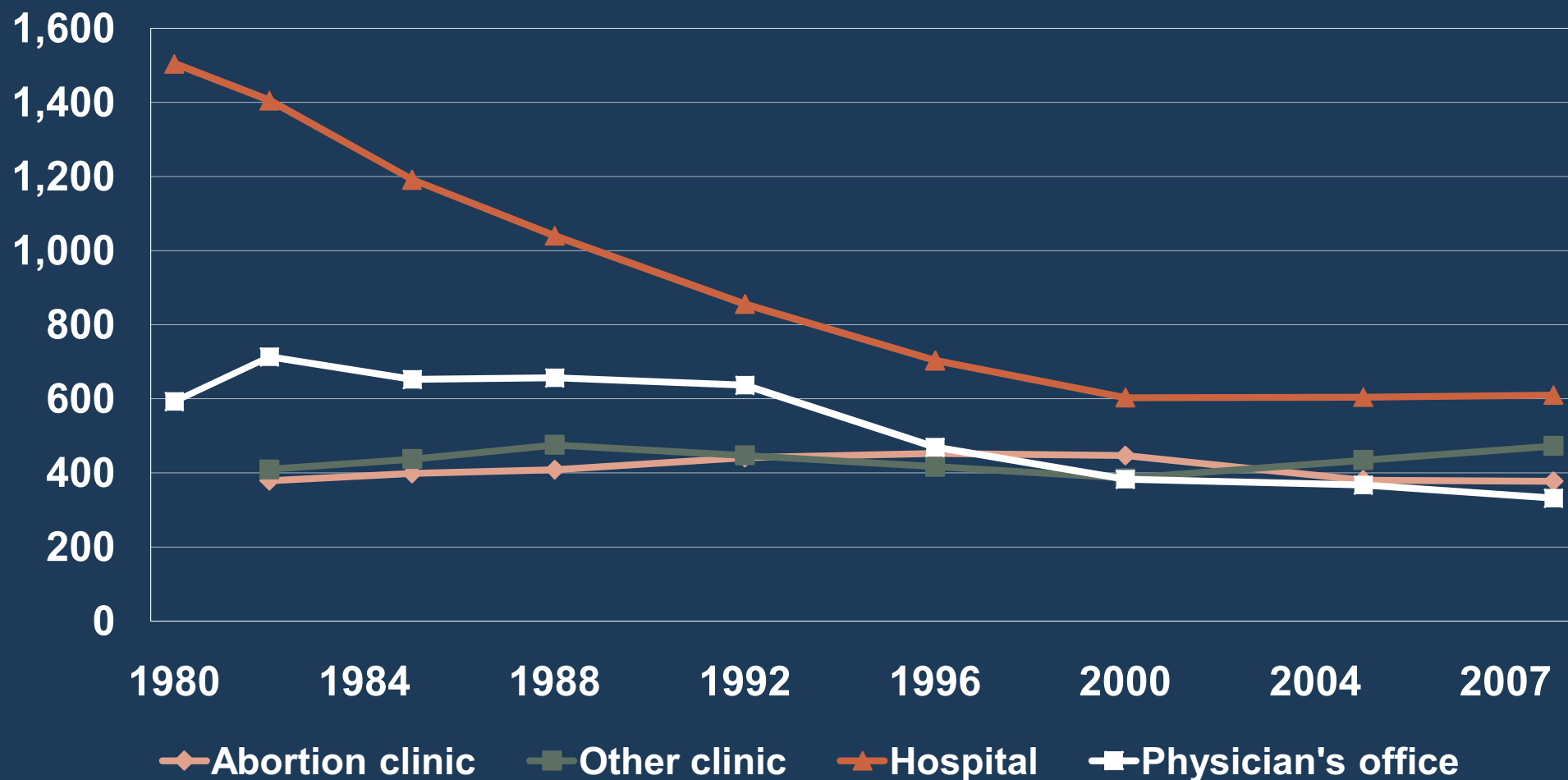
# Percentage of Abortions Performed by Each Type of Provider

% of abortions



# Number of Providers by Type

No. of providers



## Facilities Providing Only Medication Abortion Had a Significant Impact

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- A minimum of 164 providers, or 9%, offered only early medication abortion in 2008; most were nonspecialized clinics or physicians' offices with small abortion caseloads.
- The use of medication abortion, particularly by providers who do not offer surgical abortion, has slowed the decline in providers seen in previous years.

# Factors Contributing to the Decline in the Number of Abortion Providers

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- Antiabortion harassment and violence
- Social stigma/marginalization
- Professional isolation/peer pressure
- The “graying of providers”
- Inadequate economic/other incentives
- Lack of medical training opportunities

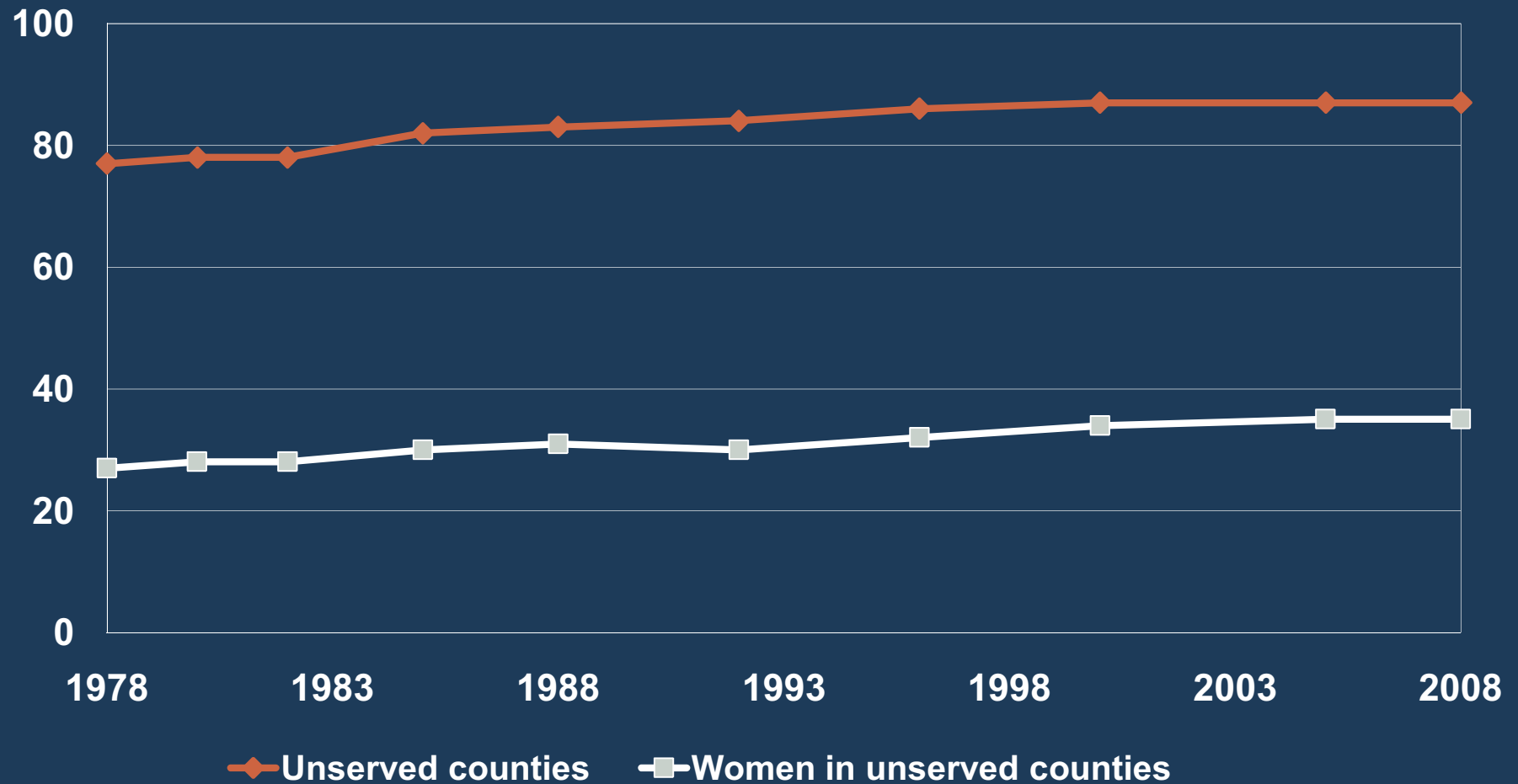
# Percentage of Providers of 400 or More Abortions per Year Who Reported Harassment in 2008

<b>Picketing</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>Picketing with physical contact with patients</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Picketing homes of staff members</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Bomb threats</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Patient pictures posted on the Internet</b>	<b>5%</b>



# **Factors That Make It Difficult For Women to Obtain Abortion Services**

# Percentages of Counties with No Provider and of Women Living in Those Counties



# State Restrictions on Abortion

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**Parental consent or notification  
for minors**

**36 states**

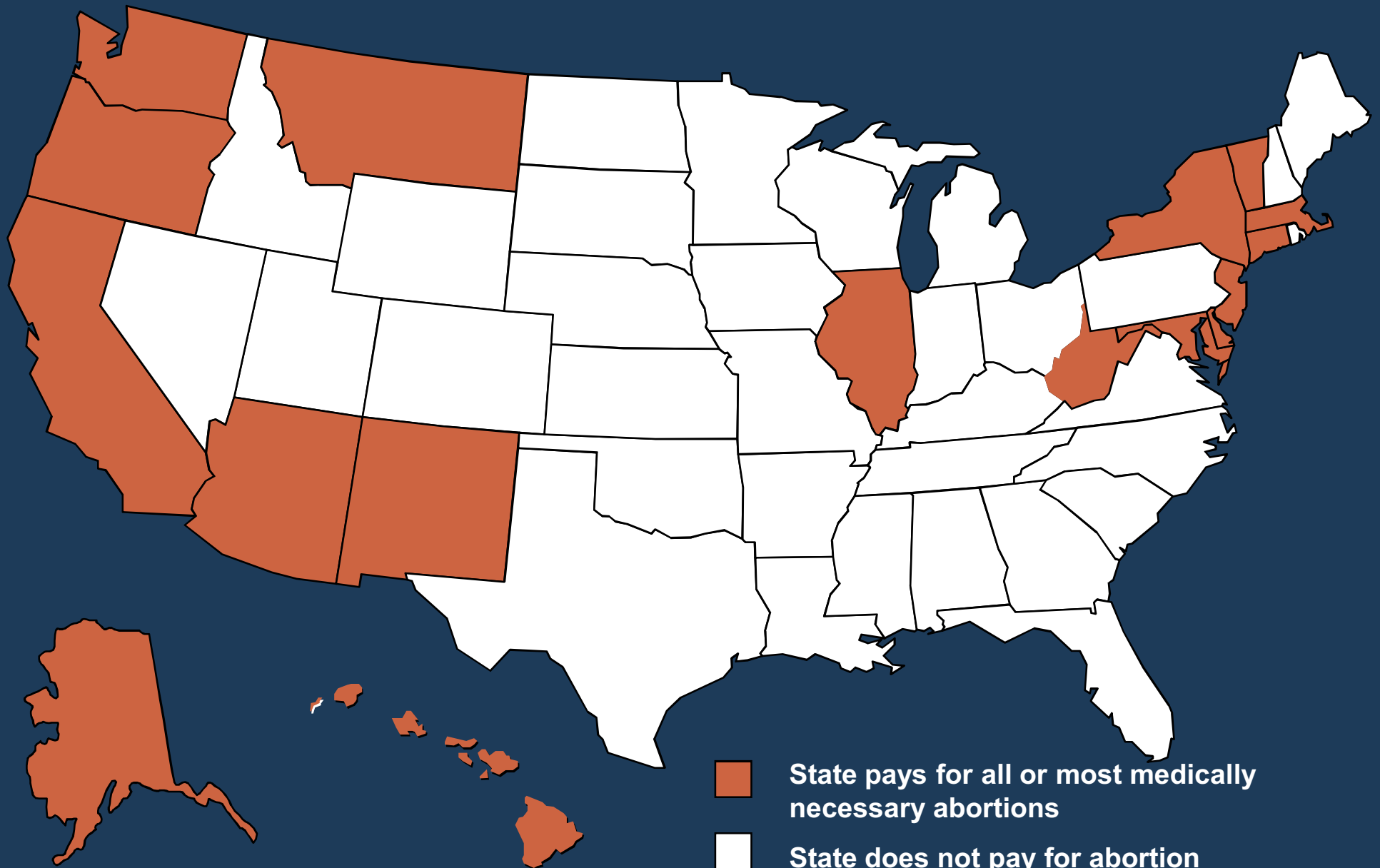
**Mandatory counseling**

**34 states**

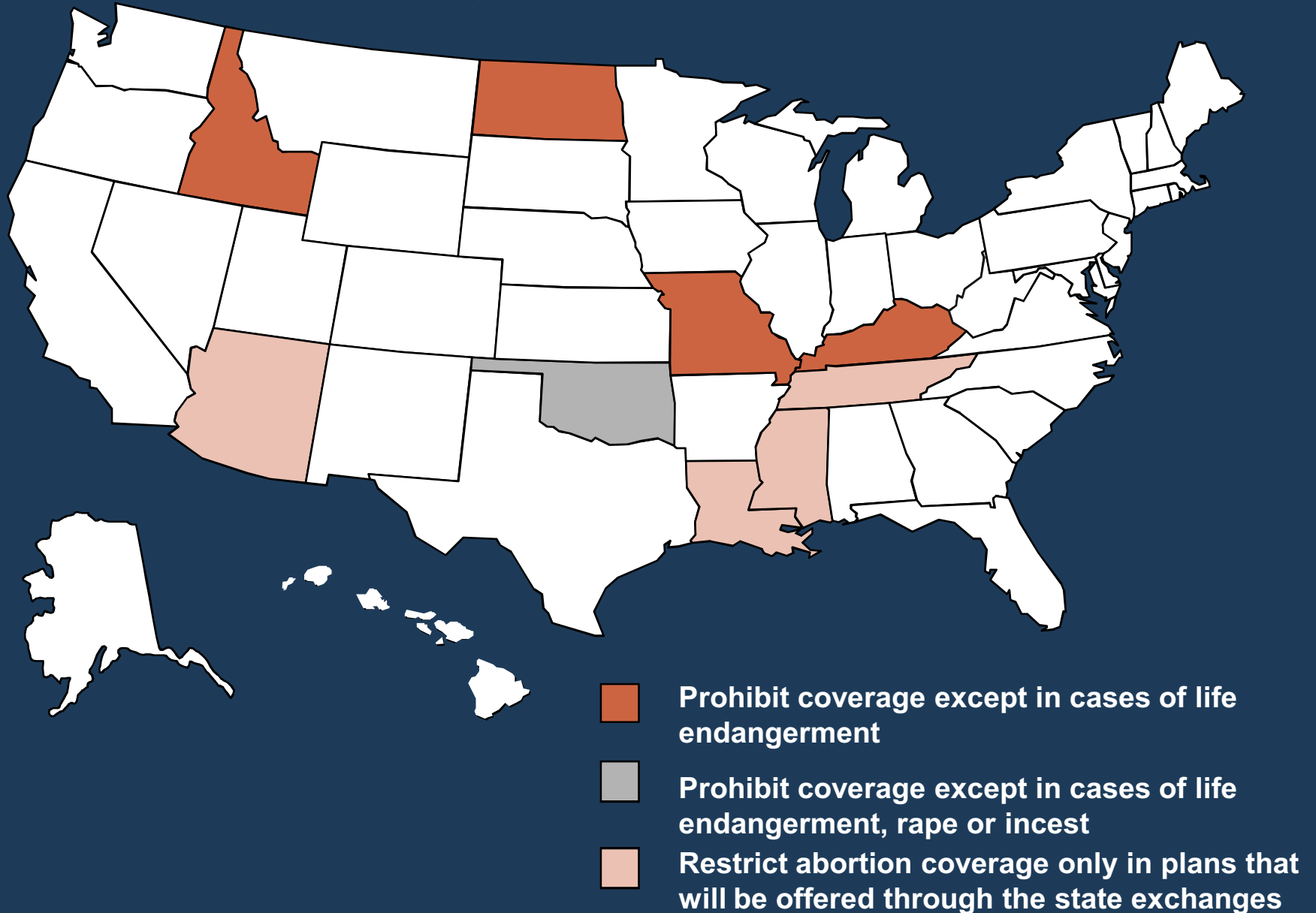
**Waiting periods**

**24 states**

# State Policies on Medicaid Coverage of Abortion



# State Policies on Private Insurance Coverage of Abortion

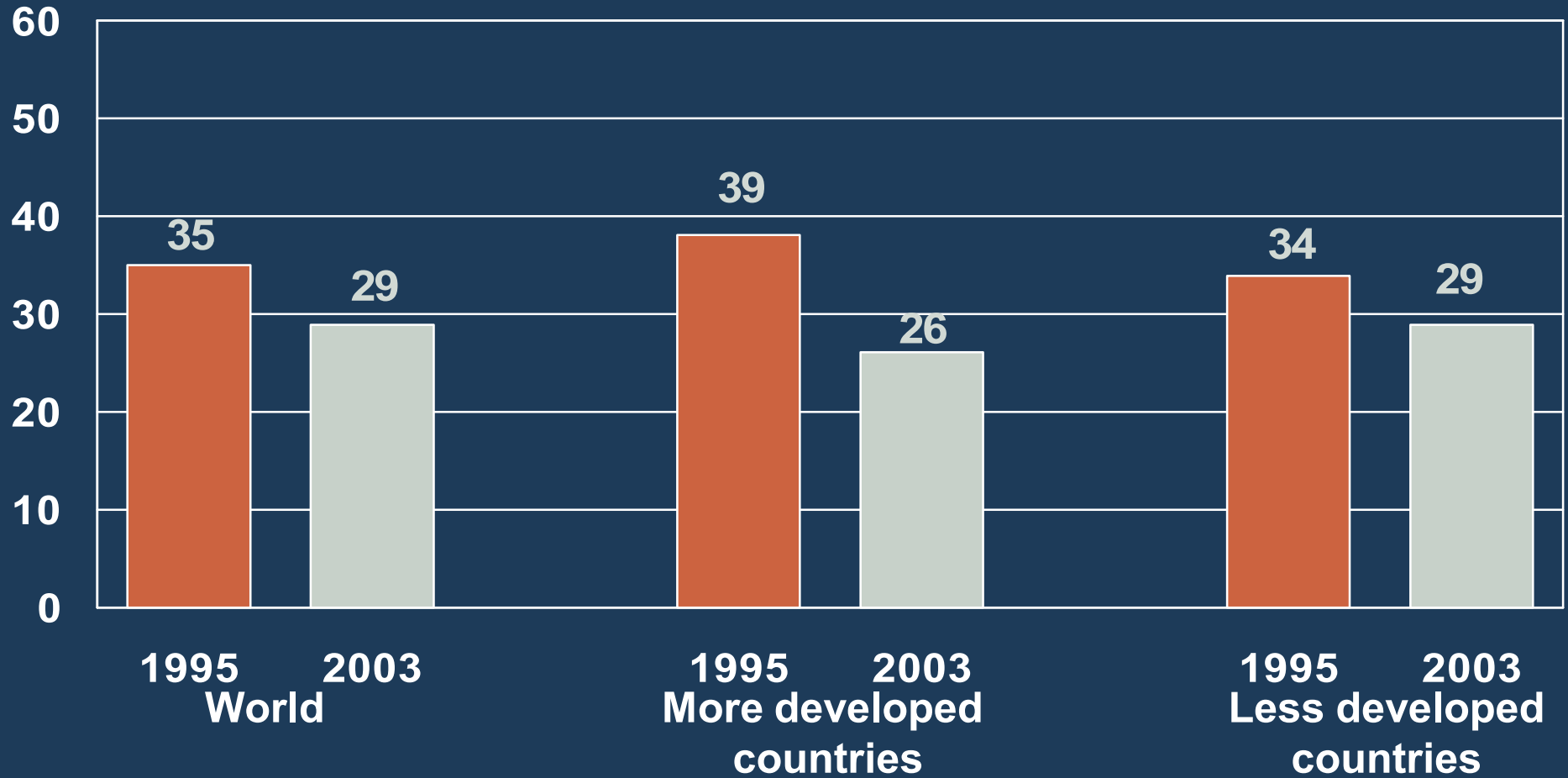




# **International Perspective on Abortion**

# Abortion has declined worldwide

Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44



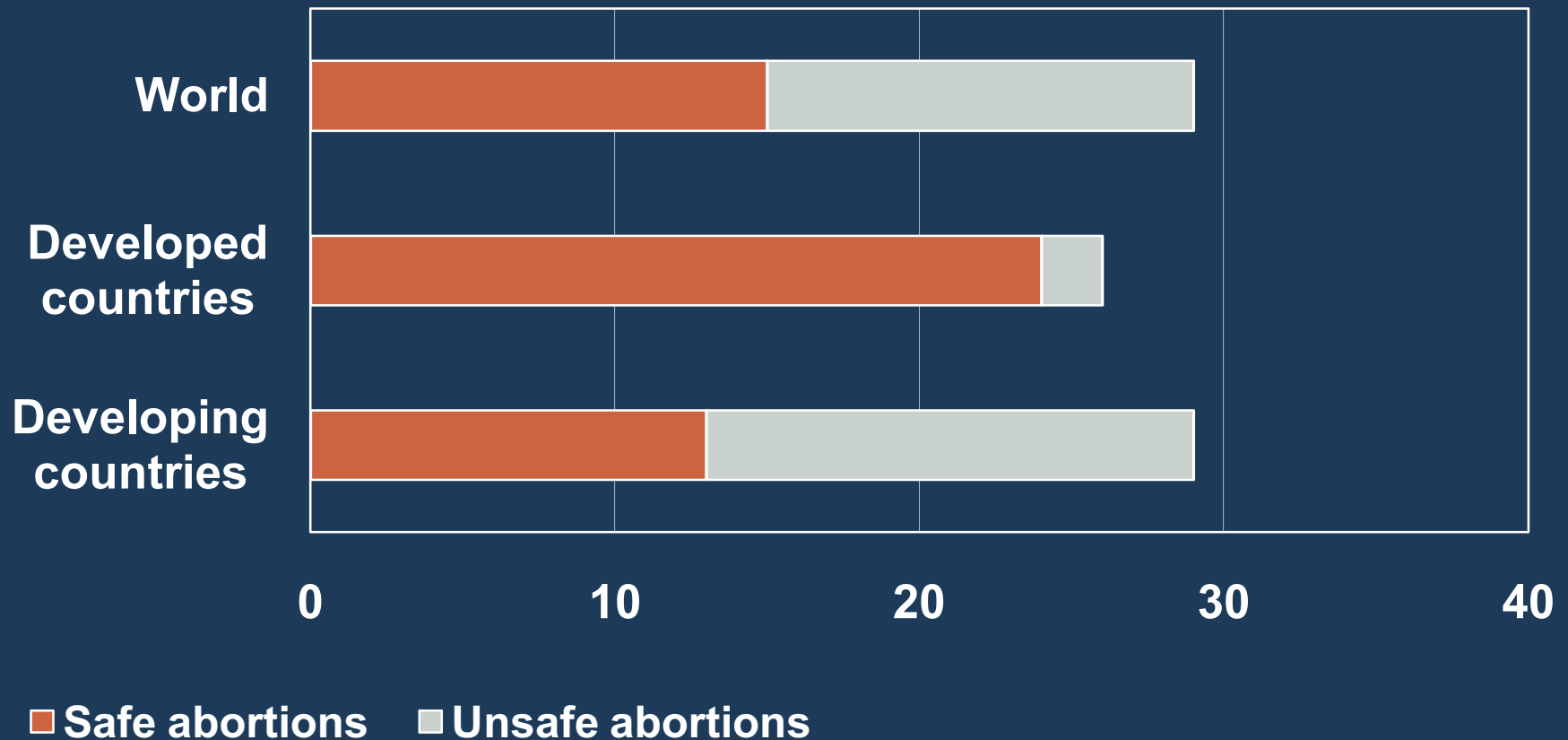
# The Legal Status of Abortion Does Not Predict Its Incidence

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- The lowest abortion rates in the world—less than 10 per 1,000 women of reproductive age—are in Europe, where abortion is legal and available.
- By contrast, in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean, where abortion law is most restrictive, the regional rates are 29 and 31 per 1,000 women, respectively.

# 20 Million Unsafe Abortions Occur Each Year

Annual abortions per 1,000 women 15–44



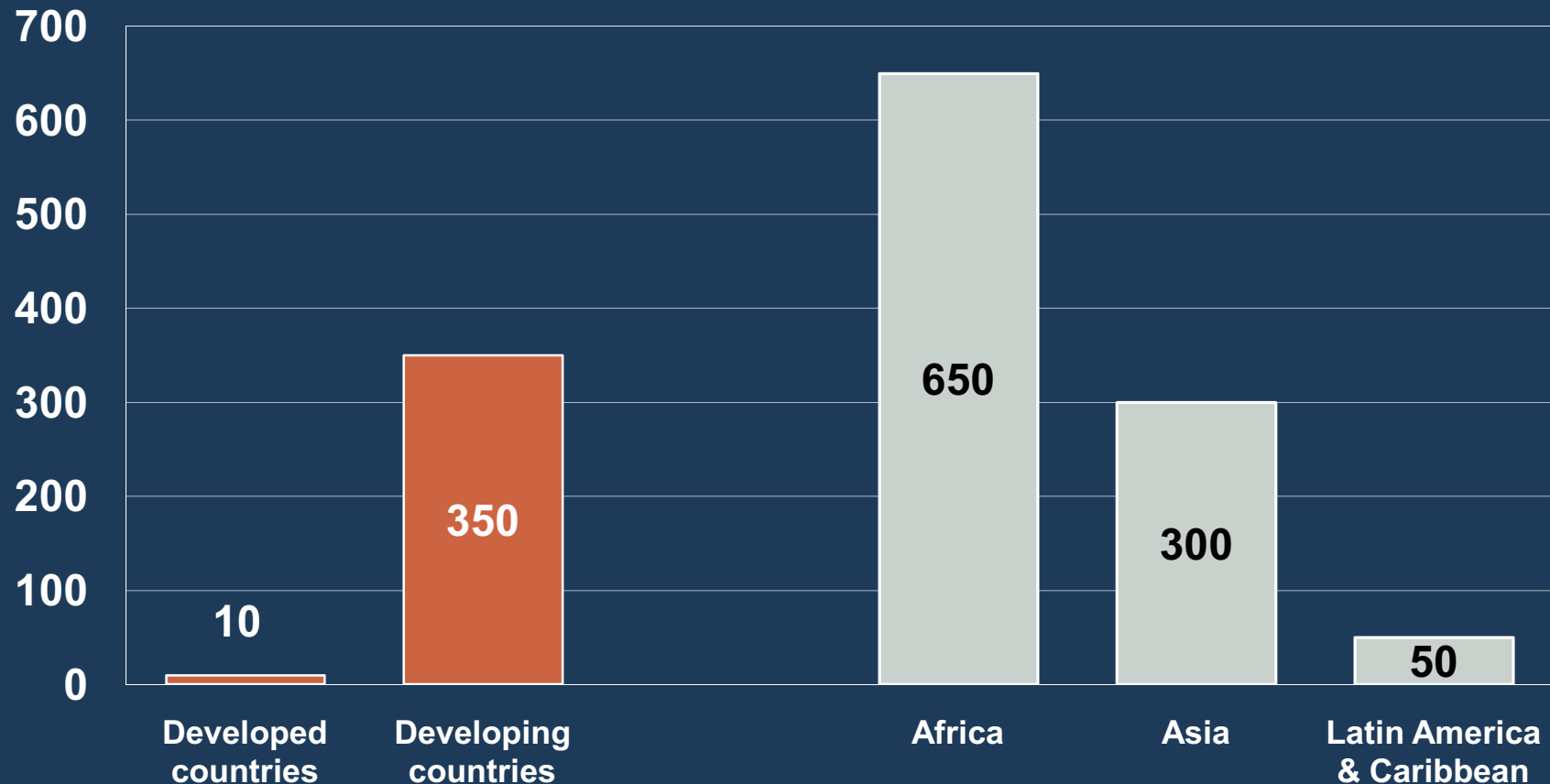
# Complications of Unsafe Abortion

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- An estimated five million women are hospitalized each year for treatment of abortion-related complications, such as hemorrhage and sepsis.
- Complications from unsafe abortion procedures account for 13% of maternal deaths, or 67,000 per year.
- Approximately 220,000 children worldwide lose their mothers every year because of abortion-related deaths.

# Almost All Abortion-Related Deaths Occur in Developing Countries

Deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions, 2003



# Changes in Abortion Law Between 1995 and 2007

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- Seventeen countries liberalized their laws to increase access to safe abortion:  
Albania, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Nepal, Portugal, Saint Lucia, South Africa, Swaziland, Switzerland and Togo.
- Three countries tightened restrictions on abortion:  
El Salvador, Nicaragua and Poland.



# Summary Points

# Incidence of Pregnancy and Abortion in the United States

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- Unintended pregnancy and abortion are common among all groups of women.
- Certain groups of women are at greater risk of unintended pregnancy than are others.
- Almost half of all pregnancies are unintended.
- Almost half of unintended pregnancies end in abortion.

# Who Has Abortions, Why and When in Pregnancy

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- Disadvantaged women bear a disproportionate burden of unintended pregnancies and abortions.
- The most frequent reasons women give are that having a child or another child would limit their ability to meet current responsibilities and that they cannot afford a child at this point in their lives.
- Almost 90% of abortions occur in the first trimester.

# Safety of Abortion

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- Abortion is one of the safest common surgical procedures for women in the United States.
- Abortion is safe over the long term and carries little or no risk of fertility-related problems, cancer or psychological illnesses.
- Laws criminalizing abortion make abortions unsafe, but do not eliminate them.

# Provision of and Access to Abortion Services

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- Most abortions occur in abortion clinics.
- Many women have to travel long distances to find a provider, which can pose significant problems for those with limited resources, or work or family responsibilities.

# Obstacles to Obtaining Abortion Services

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- Although most women obtain abortions early in pregnancy, some women face substantial obstacles to access.
- Nearly four in 10 women of reproductive age receive coverage under Medicaid, yet 32 states allow Medicaid funding for abortion only in cases of rape, incest or life endangerment.
- Lacking insurance coverage, poor women often require time to find the money to pay for an abortion, if they are able to at all.
- Legal requirements such as parental consent for minors or waiting periods are likely to cause further delays, increasing the risk of complications.

# International Perspective on Abortion

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- A very small proportion of abortions worldwide take place in the United States.
- Most unsafe abortions occur in countries where abortion is illegal.

# About Guttmacher



The Guttmacher Institute is a nonprofit organization that advances sexual and reproductive health worldwide through research, policy analysis and public education.

For more information about Guttmacher, please click [here](#).

Read our report “*Abortion in Women’s Lives*” [here](#).